

Hope in Unthinkable Wickedness and Unspeakable Sadness – December 16th, 2012

- For today, I won't be doing a prophecy update or a teaching in Romans, for what I think will be obvious reasons, given the events of Friday.
- I had come to this decision on Friday night, only to have the Holy Spirit confirm it yesterday morning, and not for the reasons you may think.
- Let me explain, while there is the component of the prophetic in that 2 Timothy 3 describes an evil world in the last days it's for another day.

- In other words, while connecting the prophetic dots is a word fitly spoken for another day, God put something else on my heart for today.
- It came by way of all the experts, who, in their futile attempts at explaining the problem and offering a solution left one even more hopeless.
- Even well known Christian leaders seem to stammer and stutter when called upon to answer the myriad of questions that always ensue.

- This is sort of textbook whenever there's a tragedy like this, and because of it, one is left with a sense of frustration in the answers given.
- In all fairness to the burdened pastor, sometimes he's forced to acquiesce to the pat or puny answer in the daunting task of defending God.
- The fear is, this good and loving God may somehow be found out as being unfair, unjust, or even worse, evil in His allowing of the tragedy.

"The greatest fear a Christian has is not a personal fear, but the fear that his Hero won't get through, that God will not be able to clear His character. ...A certain type of hypocrisy makes men hide what they feel, ...I do not know what to accept, but I am certain God will prove that He is just true and right, and I refuse to tell a lie in order to help Him out." Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," pp. 23, 84

- It's for this reason I wish to approach this unthinkable wickedness in a different way and in so doing offer hope in the unspeakable sadness.
- That said, we as believers in Jesus Christ, should in no way ever cower in the face of this, nor should we cover up for God because of this.
- Suffice it to say; "God doesn't need for us to defend Him, or His goodness, especially as it relates to what He's blamed for, or accused of."
- It's almost as if God must come up with an alibi, lest He be seen as the one Who at the scene of the crime, and committing the crime.

- While the jury may still be out for some, I can testify that in the end, the verdict will come in and God will be found not guilty for this tragedy.
- However, that verdict will not come in the conventional way, and the reason is that we've all heard the same answers and same scriptures.
- Here's an example, "The question is asked, where was God when this happened?" It comes packaged with, "Why would God allow this?"

- The answer that's given, though well intentioned, is; what do you expect when you kick God out of our schools! To me, that doesn't cut it.
- Perhaps it's that I've tasted the cup of my own child's death, and also have a five-year-old child the same age of those who met their death.
- I would suggest this answer, while valid, gets dangerously close to insinuating God is mad, when in fact, He's intensely, and divinely sad.

- Let me take this thought one step further, to suggest that God is mad actually plays into the plot and ploy of the Devil's accusation of God.
- Here's how I get there, were God not there in that school on that horrific day, then it stands to reason that God is angry and getting even.
- If God is getting even, then God is to blame for this evil, and if God is to blame for this evil, then one can wrongly conclude that God is evil.

- The problem is God can't be evil, He's the antithesis of evil, God is love, and as such, God can neither be evil, nor can He tempt with evil.

James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

- There's another very serious problem with the giving of this answer, simply put, it would imply that evil only befalls those who forsake God.
- At the risk of offering an oversimplification there is not a one of us who because we're Christian's are exempt from tragedy in a fallen world.
- Even pastor's who love and serve God are not exempt. As I was preparing this sermon Saturday morning, I learned of Lisa Furrow's death.

- Lisa was the wife of Robert Furrow the senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Tuscon in Arizona. She lost her battle to cancer after several years.
- Indulge me for just a moment as I read a portion of her last blog entry on November the 10th, about one month prior to her untimely death.

We live in a world that is enlivened by opposites. We see contrasted elements of texture, color and design in creation. Rugged cliffs edged by peaceful waters. Blankets of soft fresh green grass surrounded by ancient stones. Billowing gentle clouds often announcing fierce downpours. In our lives we can experience deep sadness that gives birth to great joy. Laughter that turns to tears or the light of peace that pierces the darkness of dread. From these vastly differing and changing landscapes, we can ascertain that the way things are are not the way they will always be, and that where we are is not where we were going to be forever. Actually, it is pretty amazing how quick things really can shift. I was thinking about this concept in terms of our experiences and how we relate to those around us. Somedays recently I have thought things like ..."Today I will have the grand goal of getting up and getting dressed!" But then, I actually get up get dressed feel better and then find myself outside of the house and around people (this is big these days, though I believe it will not always be like this.) ...To have the opportunity to see things and people at a more deliberate pace is a blessing. I believe there is always someone *opposite* us. Someone *across* from us that we can see and affect or be affected by no matter where we are. For example, my daily trips for the last 20 days have taken me to Radiation Oncology at UMC. Sitting in that waiting room, I have seen many people "across" the room from me. A young anxious mom with a bald headed teenager in pj's. Another bald headed teenager with his dad, toting an IV pole. A middle aged man telling someone, anyone who would listen, that he hasn't been able to drink water for a long time and that they are going to try to teach him how to eat starting tonight. A women in a wheel chair with a bandage on her neck seeking to sooth the burn of radiation. These are just a few. ...I believe we are all meant to cross the street and touch those around us in some way, when and as we can. There is always someone across the room or across the street or across the city or county that we can reach out to with compassion and touch. A phone call, a prayer, an act of mercy or practical help, an all important visit to listen and just sit with someone suffering. These are all great gifts that may cost us some comfort, but trying to exist only for our own comfort is a sickbed of it's own. Lisa Furrow Blog, November 10th 2012

Greg Laurie, who himself, along with his wife Cathe, lost their son Christopher in an auto accident, concerning this tragedy wrote the following; All I can say is this was pure evil. The heartlessness and wickedness of this man that did the shooting is really unimaginable. I know from personal experience that the pain of losing a child is a fate worse then death for a parent. At times like this we must reflect on the essential message of Christmas, which is, Immanuel has come. Immanuel means God is with us. I know God is there ready to bring His comfort to those grieving right now in Connecticut. I know He is here right now to bring comfort to all of us who are heartbroken to hear such news.

- The bottom line is, this is where and how comfort and hope can come, in the face of unthinkable wickedness, and unspeakable sadness.
- It comes by way of knowing that God was there, and God is still there, comforting those who are even now feeling such a stabbing pain.
- Just because mankind kicks God out of our public schools, wanting nothing to do with Him, doesn't mean He wants nothing to do with us.

Psalms 147:3 NKJV He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds.

Psalms 34:18 NIV The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

- Not only is the Lord close in comforting the brokenhearted, but the brokenhearted can also comfort others vis-à-vis their comfort from God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NIV (3) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, (4) who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (5) For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (6) If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. (7) And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

- OK, this may answer the question of where was God, but it may not answer the question of why would God. "Why would God allow this?"
- Please know that there certainly is plenty of those "why" questions, that we cannot possibly know the answers to while this side of heaven.
- However, I'm of the belief, God will bring good out of something as evil as this. We can't know when or how He will do it, we can know that.

"Why would God allow this thing to happen? ...One thing ...is ...[that it's a] knock on the head [of] all such shallow optimism as telling people to 'look on the bright side of things,' or that 'every cloud has a silver lining.' There are some clouds that are black all through. ...Facing facts as they are produces despair, not frenzy, but real downright despair, and God never blames a man for despair. The man who thinks, must be pessimistic, [as] thinking can never produce optimism. The wisest man that ever lived said that 'he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.' The basis of things are not reasonable, but wild and tragic, and to face things as they are brings a man to the ordeal of despair. ...When a man gets to despair he knows that all his thinking will never get him out, he will only get out by the sheer creative effort of God; consequently, he is in the right attitude to receive from God that which he cannot gain for himself. ...Wrong things happen actually, because things are wrong really."

Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," pp. 20, 21, 22

- In other words, it's when those wrong things, those evil things happen, they serve as a catalyst of sorts to bring man to the end of himself.
- When that which was meant for evil ushers a man to the end of himself, he is then ready for the salvation which he cannot gain for himself.
- I think of Joseph, who was the recipient of such evil for seventeen years, yet in the end he could say God brought salvation in spite of it.

Genesis 50:20 NKJV But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.

- I think of King David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, who was not only the recipient of such evil, but he himself the perpetrator of such evil.

Psalms 27:13-14 NIV I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. (14) Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

- We will see the goodness of the Lord in spite this. What was meant for evil in Connecticut, nay the entire nation; God will work it for good.
- It's important to understand the Devil is God's Devil and he's not allowed to do anything unless it ultimately fulfills God's plan of redemption.
- I am still confident that there will be many who will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ because of this tragedy, on that Friday.

"If there is no tragedy at the back of human life, no gap between God and man, then the redemption of Jesus Christ is 'much ado about nothing.' ...A healthy minded man bases his life on actual conditions, but let him be hit by bereavement, and when he has got beyond the noisy bit and the blasphemous bit, he will find ...that despair is the basis of human life unless a man accepts a revelation from God and enters into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ."

Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," p. 25

- By the way, those children, and maybe even some of those adults, entered into the kingdom and are even now in the presence of the Lord.
- This, in closing, begs the question of whether or not you will take your first breath in His presence, after taking your last breath in this world.
- I'll end today's sermon the way we've been ending the prophecy updates, as of late, by simply and briefly sharing with you the Gospel.

- By way of illustration, here's a simple way to communicate a simple message called; "the Gospel," which means "Good News."
- In the beginning God and man were together but through Adam sin entered the world and separated man from God. (That's the bad news!)
- Since entered the world through Adam, Jesus entered the world as the second Adam to die and pay for our sin. (That's the good news!)
- The finished work of the cross, and the resurrection of the Christ, bridged the gap, and thus reunited man to God.
- It's for this reason the Christian faith is the truth, and all other religions are false. It's a relationship as opposed to a religion.